



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, August 14 - 21, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

Bradley has been working in the Lower Clark Fork near Lozeau. She captured and collared a 45-pound pup.

WS Bart Smith has been trapping east of Hamilton. Asher has been working and trapping near Red Lodge. She also followed up on wolf reports in the Pryors (no verified activity). Laudon and the NWMT crew of volunteers continue their extensive field effort in the Lower Clark Fork area.

Flights: Bradley flew on August 11, 12, and 17 in western Montana. Ross flew in southwest Montana on 8/20.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On 8/14, a herding dog (border collie) was killed by wolves west of Hall. The dog, along with several other guard dogs were protecting a band of goats. The wolves involved are believed to be the same pair that killed a calf in early July near Silver King ridge. After that incident WS was authorized to kill 1 wolf, collar 1 wolf but no wolves were caught or killed and that control window was due to close today, Aug. 17th. FWP authorized WS to continue with the same control plan, with a new 45 day window in which to work. A shoot-on-site permit was issued to the landowner for 1 wolf.

On 8/17 WS confirmed one calf and had a second calf as probable killed by wolves in the West Fork of Corral Creek (public land) on the south side of the Centennial Valley in Montana and near the Idaho border. This is in the territory of the Sage Creek pack. This pack has been involved in confirmed livestock losses in Montana and Idaho in 2009. Six adult wolves have been killed thus far and with this newly confirmed incident, MT WS has been authorized to remove the remaining pack members.

On 8/17, MTWS also got a call from a sheep producer that an unknown number of buck sheep had been killed in the Rock Creek area (private land) of the Blacktail south of Dillon. [This producer had lost sheep in late July from a group of three wolves (2 blacks and 1 gray). A control action to remove the three wolves was initiated in July in response to the sheep loss. FWP had also discussed the feasibility of increasing protection of the buck sheep through herders, dogs, or fladry. WS removed the gray and wounded one of the blacks on 7/27]. On 8/18, WS flew the sheep pasture looking for the one or two remaining blacks to complete the control work FWP had already requested and found the Centennial Pack within a 1/2 mile of the sheep pasture (3 adult grays and 5 pups). WS was then authorized to remove the uncollared adult from the Centennial pack, which they did that same morning (the 18th). This was the first depredation incident for the Centennial pack in 2009. WS was also still authorized to finish up control work for the 1 or 2 remaining black wolves. Also on 8/18, WS began the necropsy work on injured / dead bucks in this same pasture and losses are significant. The exact final tally of injured or dead bucks from this week's investigation is not available at this time, but it is estimated to be about 120 bucks. The remaining 12-14 bucks were gathered and taken to the home ranch. A couple of those were injured and are not expected to survive. The exact final tally of injured and dead buck sheep will be published in a future wolf weekly. The status of the 1-2 black wolves is unknown at this time. During a monitoring flight on 8/20, no black wolves were seen in the area and the Centennial pack was not near any livestock.

On 8/20, WS confirmed a calf was killed in the same area as a previous depredation in the Upper Ruby / Jack Creek pack territory on public land [confirmed on 7/30 after riders round the carcass on 7/29]. At that time, WS was authorized to remove 1 adult wolf. One yearling male was killed on 8/20 and control efforts are complete.

On 8/20, WS completed the control action and lethally removed one adult black male from the Horse Prairie pack. No other incidents have been reported since the confirmed injury on August 7.

Outreach and Education

FWP staff toured a ranch near Hall to discuss wolf-livestock interactions (cattle in this situation) and learn about the challenges and economic costs of raising livestock in the presence of wolves. Some of the topics discussed were accurate detection of injured / dead livestock, livestock performance (weight gain, stress, disease, changes in livestock behavior), forage management and cattle distribution, and increased labor. Attending were FWP Director Maurier, FWP Helena Wildlife staff (Ken McDonald, Quentin Kujala, Sime), FWP Missoula staff (Mike Thompson, Bradley), FWP Commissioner for that District Dr. Robert Ream, and Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board Coordinator George Edwards. We greatly appreciate the time this ranch family took to show us around and share their perspectives and experiences.

Research Activities

Bradley, Sime, and USFWS Bangs attended a meeting at the University of Montana, along with University staff, folks affiliated with The Blackfoot Challenge, and others from the livestock community to discuss a potential research effort to consider wolf – livestock interactions and economics. Many different ideas about what and how the research project could go were discussed. It was a very productive discussion and more are expected in the future.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

Nothing to report at this time.

Other Updates

Northern Rockies Delisting Litigation

On 8/20, a preliminary injunction request was filed by the coalition of 13 environmental and animal rights groups requesting that wolves in Montana and Idaho be placed back on the Endangered Species list while the court decides the main case within the next year. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of Montana and other interveners will be given an opportunity to respond before the Federal Judge makes a decision. The timing of the next steps will be decided next week. This matter (likely the near-term focus for all parties involved) is expected to be settled one way or another before much more occurs with the main delisting lawsuit.

Montana was granted “intervener” status in the Missoula Federal Court where the federal delisting decision is being challenged. Montana/FWP’s participation in the lawsuit will support the federal delisting decision that took effect May 4, but from Montana’s unique perspective and responsibility to conserve and manage resident wildlife.

Despite ongoing litigation and unless otherwise directed by the Federal Court, FWP is still the lead agency. FWP carries out wolf conservation and management (as a resident wildlife species classified as a species in need of management), as outlined by Montana laws, administrative rules, and the federally-approved state wolf plan.

Background: On June 2, a coalition of 13 groups, represented by the law firm EarthJustice, challenged the USFWS delisting decision in Federal District Court in Missoula (9th Circuit). The complaint alleges the USFWS delisting decision was an arbitrary and capricious violation of the federal Endangered Species Act for a variety of reasons. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition also filed a lawsuit challenging the federal delisting decision. The groups will be represented by their own attorney’s, respectively, but the cases were consolidated by the Court. Additionally, the State of Wyoming filed a lawsuit in the 10th Circuit (Cheyenne Wyoming) challenging USFWS’s rejection of Wyoming’s regulatory framework and state plan.

The next step in the Missoula delisting lawsuit is to finalize the schedule by which the main case will proceed. The schedule, once established, will determine deadlines for filing information with the Court and possible hearing dates.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season:

FWP is making final preparations for a possible 2009 hunting season, but advises that developments in the delisting litigation could prevent the season from opening or could interrupt the season and close it prematurely. FWP encourages the public to check the FWP Wolf Page and the FWP Hunting Page often for the latest news and updates.

The 2009 Wolf Hunting Regulations have been printed and are being distributed to FWP offices and license providers. Regulations are also available at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/regulations.html>.

FWP plans to begin selling wolf hunting licenses on August 31 at FWP offices, online, and through license providers. Because the wolf hunting season is designed as a quota-based system, any interested hunter (resident or non-resident) can participate by purchasing a conservation license and a wolf hunting license. Additional information about the wolf hunting season will be available very soon.

Other: FWP is inviting hunters, landowners, outfitters, and others to get involved earlier than ever before to help set hunting seasons for the next two years (2010 and 2011). FWP is more formally asking the public for input on things they'd like to see changed or considered for any upcoming big game or upland game bird hunting season before FWP develops tentative regulation proposals. Public comment will be accepted August 4 – September 4. See fwp.mt.gov to comment online or attend one of 7 open houses on August 27 at any FWP Regional Office, 6-9pm.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for October 23 in Room 152, Montana Capital Building. Interested persons will be able to listen on the Internet. The meeting time and agenda will be announced in the coming weeks.

The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana at the statewide office: 657-6464. Or, call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.